

**ADDRESS BY THE  
VICE CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA  
AT THE USP LAUCALA SEPTEMBER GRADUATION CEREMONY 2013**

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**1. Acknowledgements and Greetings**

**His Majesty King Tupou VI (the Sixth) and Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific;**

**Her Majesty Queen Nanasipau'u;**

**His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Fiji Islands, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau;  
Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council, Mr. Ikbal Jannif;**

**Hon. Fiji Minister of Education and Government Ministers;**

**Members of Council, and Senate;**

**Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Members of the USP SMT**

**Heads of International and Regional Organisations;**

**Graduands and their families and friends;**

**Colleagues, Members of Staff and students;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**2. Welcome and Congratulations**

This morning has a special significance, being the first visit to USP of His Majesty King Tupou the Sixth (VI) and our Chancellor. It is indeed a great honour and privilege to warmly welcome your Majesties to this auspicious occasion, the second Laucala Campus Graduation ceremony for 2013. I join our students, staff and guests in sharing our deep joy at your Majesties' gracious presence this morning.

In July, we were deeply honoured to have been present in Tonga at a very dignified ceremony of [His Majesty's installation as the 20th USP Chancellor](#) which was combined with a [Tonga Campus Graduation](#). Today, in recognition of the achievements of our students, we have come together again to celebrate with them.

In early December 1971, USP had its first ever graduation ceremony at the old Hangar, located at what we now know as our Lower Campus (a few hundred metres from here), where the 1st USP Chancellor, His late Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou the Fourth (IV) of Tonga, conferred diplomas and degrees to the pioneering student's from our member countries. Our records show that a total of 30 students (from Cook Islands, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga) graduated in 1971 – (14 Bachelor's and 16 Diplomas), the first ever USP graduation. In USP's early years, the graduating numbers were relatively small, and graduation only took place once a year in early December. With growing graduate numbers over the years, it became necessary to have more graduation ceremonies. Currently, we have two graduation ceremonies in Laucala (one in April and one in September) and one each at Alafua Campus, Emalus Campus and Solomon Islands Campus, plus graduations at the smaller campuses provided the numbers graduating reach a minimum of 50 per campus. These regional campus graduations

provide a vehicle for families to share these memorable occasions with their own sons and daughters in their own countries, and have strengthened our bonds with our member countries.

USP has come a long way since that first graduation ceremony in 1971. The Hangar is no longer there, now replaced by our Marine Studies complex. Overall student numbers have grown significantly and this year we reached the highest ever recorded numbers of students of almost than 27,000 students, an average annual increase of 8% in the last 5 years. We now have 14 Campuses and 11 Centres and we will be opening up a few more in the region. We have graduated 39,732 students. Given the contribution that USP has made to the region in human resources development, it is no wonder that the USP brand is very visible in the region. In the recent review of the Pacific Plan, USP has been identified as the most successful regional organization, with a strong reputation for quality, relevance, good governance and accountability. We acknowledge with gratitude the deep foresight of USP's designers and planners, who were our Pacific Island leaders at the time. USP is now synonymous with successful regional cooperation that has served the region well in its 45 years.

### **3. To the Graduates**

Let me speak to the graduates now, the very people whose achievements we are here to celebrate. As one writer, Catherine Pulsifer, has noted: "*Graduation is a time of completion, of finishing, of an ending. However, it is also a time of celebration of achievement and a beginning for the new graduate.*"

All of you will be happy that you have come so far and I am sure will have many wonderful memories of your journey at USP. The sacrifices including the many late nights doing assignments or research, the early rises to attend 8.00am lectures, the separation from home and families, will all come to pass today as you reap the fruits of your labour.

As you enter the world of work and life generally, it will be worth reflecting on with this quote by Oliver Wendell Homes:

*Greatness is not in where we stand, but in what direction we are moving. We must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it - but sail we must, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.*

The points about knowing the direction of moving and of not being idle are all important in your quest for lifelong success.

Some of you may have read the biography of one of Fiji's distinguished and learned sons titled **He Served: A Biography of Macu Salato**, by Robert C. Kiste. As most of you know, Dr Salato (1915-1990) was a medical doctor by profession who went on to be the first Fijian Mayor of Suva after independence, Fiji's Acting High Commissioner in the UK, a Secretary-General of the then South Pacific Commission (SPC) in Noumea (now Secretariat of the Pacific Community), Acting Director of the Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP) in Honolulu and was touted as one ahead of his time.

In his address to the graduating class of USP in December 1977, he cited the example of frigate birds, and I quote

*"Early morning at dawn they go out from the shore to fish at sea. They fish and feed and later in the day, each sea bird will bring back to land a part of the catch - perhaps to feed its young or mates. And so it should be with you - you graduands- you have in a manner of speaking, been fishing in this University for the past few years - for knowledge, new techniques, new concepts and more importantly for wisdom".*

Dr Salato's plea was for the graduates to take part of the catch home to their own people. This plea still resonates today. You are the future leaders of your countries, be good role models, use the knowledge that you have gained at USP and put them to good use to help your families, your communities, and your countries and the world. Individually and collectively, you can make an impact on your society. **Be ready to serve without wanting to be served.**

Congratulations and I wish you well in your future endeavours. USP has given you strong wings. It is up to you now to fly high.

#### **4. Graduation Ceremony**

Today, we have 717 students receiving certificates, diplomas and degrees.

- 55% of all graduates are females, showing growing gender equality in higher education;
- 61% are at undergraduate level; and 39% at Postgraduate level;
- 99% of graduates are from the region and a few from seven non-member countries of Korea, Sri Lanka, USA, Guyana, Federated States of Micronesia, Canada and India – a truly international mix when you add on our own 12 member countries.

I am particularly pleased to note that one of our own staff members is graduating with a PhD specializing in an area our Strategic Plan has prioritized – Pacific studies and education for sustainable development (ESD).

PhD training of our own people is of high priority and one of the initiatives in the SP is to implement a Focused Scholarship Scheme for member country PhD candidates. These are targeted for our own people who would undertake research to better understand the challenges facing our member countries and to find better, innovative, cost-effective and sustainable development. We will expand this scheme in the coming years.

#### **5. General Reporting on USP**

Now, please allow me to highlight a few general points on developments at USP this year.

- a) [Strategic Plan 2013-2018](#):

- The [Strategic Plan 2013-2018](#) has been satisfactorily rolled out this year with formal launches in Suva, Vanuatu and Nuku'alofa;
- USP is at its cross-roads and this Plan is both exciting and challenging, in that it is bold and imaginative and aspires to transform USP from good to excellent, culminating in USP's 50th Anniversary in 2018;
- The main focus of the Plan is on excellence, students, regional campuses and research with targeted initiatives in place to promote the improvements of services and expansion of activities in these crucial areas. New campuses will be built in Kiribati and Solomon Islands with ADB funding, while the Lautoka campus will begin construction later this year. Funds are still being sought for the RMI Campus.

b) *Collaborations with other Universities and other institutions in the Pacific*

- The SP also promotes the USP as an exemplar institution where it works with national institutions with the collective goal of lifting higher education participation rates in the Pacific as a means of achieving higher standards of living and improved economic and social development;
- USP has partnered with the three Universities in Fiji and the Fiji Higher Education Commission in the setting up of the Committee of Accreditation of University Qualifications (CAUQ) as a way of getting university courses and programmes accredited for improved quality;
- Regionally, USP has taken the lead in the formation of the Association of the Heads of Tertiary Institutions in the Pacific Islands ([AHTIPI](#)) thus creating a forum for dialogue on common issues with a view to helping and learning from each other and sharing experiences and good practices;
- A regional research association amongst Pacific Universities and others outside the Pacific has been established to allow for more multi-disciplinary and collaborative research in member countries.
- Significant work is also being done to create a regional research and education network as well as assisting countries with their national networking.

c) *Other Fiji-specific developments*

- Fiji is the heart of higher education provision for Pacific Forum Islands Countries. With the goal of creating a knowledge society and economy in Fiji, the Government of Fiji has established the Fiji Higher Education Commission. We are working collaboratively with FHEC.
- Before the end of this year, we will start building a 96 bed student hostel on Laucala Campus to help ease severe pressure on student accommodation. However, given the major increase in student numbers, we expect that this new addition will not satisfy the demand, hence there is a need to add 300 beds during each year of the Strategic Plan to reach the target. Public/private partnerships will be explored for the construction of about 2000 additional beds at the major campuses of the University.
- As indicated we are planning on a new Campus for Lautoka with funding under a loan from the Fiji National Provident Fund;
- Two new learning centres in Sigatoka and Rakiraki will be added later in the year to cater for the populations in these semi-urban areas;

As you will see, the University is set for significant additional growth throughout its 12 member countries.

## **6. Conclusions**

In conclusion, let me say that the level of higher education is much lower in the Pacific than other parts of the world. Yet higher education holds the key to success in the open competitive and knowledge-dependent world. Much needs to be done in tertiary education by all key stakeholders and USP is excited about the opportunity to work collaboratively to raise the level and quality of higher education in the Pacific. Despite challenges, we are confident about our brighter future in the Pacific

Your Majesties, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, a final word to the graduates-USP has given you a firm foundation for lifelong success. As someone has said, "*Each day offers the promise of new possibilities. Rise confidently and embrace them wholeheartedly. They hold great power.*" (unknown)

The future is what you make of it. Much is expected of you. Make USP proud by your strong, innovative, ethical and excellent contributions.

*Thank you and May God richly Bless you all.*

**Professor Rajesh Chandra  
Vice-Chancellor & President**